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ABSTRACT

Numerous studies have addressed questions concerning when it is appropriate for a teacher to give oral or written corrective feedback of an emergent reader's efforts; when students should begin to take a personal role in noting their errors; and how corrective feedback is most efficiently handled. Correction should focus primarily on errors that disrupt meaning. A teacher's role, especially as a model, is crucial in developing the skills for self-correction that students can independently make use of. Error correction and corrective feedback are not divided between clear cut classifications of teacher roles, student roles, and strategies used to facilitate correction, but are all interconnected to some extent. It is important not to provide constant correction to the point where the student begins to undermine his/her view of self, resulting in fear to trust their own judgment and an overreliance on feedback from others. Ultimately for a teacher, it is important to be observant and to consider the individual student's needs. (Contains 6 references.) (RS)

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The Role of Error Correction in Working With Emergent Readers

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Introduction

In a first grade class in a suburban North Bay community, a young boy is regularly engaged in numerous reading and writing activities, and has been recognized as a low performer in both of these areas. As a result, he is struggling with creating his own writing, and making sense of both what he is writing and what he is reading. The teacher who is working with him one-on-one, is continually witnessing his attempts and frustrations. Because he is a low performer, correcting him with corrective feedback has remained a problematic issue. He is continually making random, senseless guesses and inferences about words, including how they are spelled and what their meanings may be. The teacher feels that he needs to enjoy the experience of reading and writing freely, but at the same time realizes that he frequently struggles and becomes anxious when he encounters work that is difficult for him to produce or understand. She is concerned about and wants to prevent him from embracing views of himself as being a deficient reader or writer.

As a result of instances such as these, important questions arise about the analysis and correction of student errors, that the teacher cannot ignore. When is it appropriate for the teacher to give oral or written corrective feedback of a student's reading and writing efforts? Also, when should the student begin to take a personal role in noticing his errors and make the necessary self-corrections? Finally, how is corrective feedback most effectively handled, and are there particular strategies that will ordinarily generate the most positive and appropriate results? With these questions emerges the focus of this paper, and the need for further examination, clarification, and discussion on an issue that few teachers have mastered.

Statement

What is the role of error correction or corrective feedback, teacher as well as self-directed, in working with young children as emergent readers and writers? When should correction occur, and what are some essential strategies for implementing it? Corrective feedback is broadly defined by Gunning (1996) as any information that is provided to a student who has failed to give a correct response, and is designed to help the student respond correctly. Self directed error correction therefore refers to the information that the student personally processes in order to recognize an incorrect response and substitute a response that is accurate.

Review of Literature

Role of Teacher in Error Correction

Gunning (1996) in agreement with other researchers, suggests that correcting student's errors can be more beneficial than simply ignoring them. Studies show that children of young ages require more corrective feedback than those at a more advanced level, because they have not yet mastered the skills to automatically self-correct. (Grimes, 1981) According to Swartz (1997), when students make an error or are having difficulty with a word, the teacher is the one who observes this taking place, and has to decide how much information individual students need and infer the types of strategies they will use in order to be successful.

The teacher may find it necessary to prompt students with relevant questions that relate to helpful problem solving procedures. According to Gunning (1996) some useful questions can be administered. Is there any part of the word that you can say? Is the word like any that you know? What would make sense here? How would you say the

first syllable? What about the last syllable? Of course along with this comes giving the students enough time to internalize and process these cues. Albright and Bailey (1998) refer to this as a teacher's invitation to the student to make meaningful predictions.

Pany and McCoy conducted studies in 1998 on third grade students with learning disabilities, to see what effects teacher-directed corrective feedback had on student's word recognition and comprehension in oral reading. The students read under three treatment conditions: corrective feedback on every error, correction on meaning change errors only, and no feedback regardless of errors. The results of these studies corroborate the findings of various other investigations, that teacher-supplied corrective feedback does *not* appear to interfere with the comprehension process in reading. In fact, such feedback has been found to have a beneficial effect on reading comprehension and word recognition primarily among students with learning disabilities.

The role of the teacher is without a doubt a extremely crucial one. Gunning (1996) and Schwartz (1997) conclude that most importantly, the teacher should be a model or demonstrator, illustrating that actual processes leading to correction are taking place, and when and how this correction should be implemented. It is recommended that a teacher presents a wide variety and range of literacy experiences. She should not only represent when to apply self-correction, but also promote discussion of what strategies work best in specific conditions, and how students can make personal decisions on how to use them to their benefit. This can take place quite effectively in shared or guided reading practices. If the teacher is actively modeling a range of skills and giving positive feedback and praise to students about their own progress, then the students are more likely to practice and make use of a wider variety of skills when working independently.

(Grimes, 1981) Schwartz (1997) also emphasizes the importance of incorporating writing experiences, which will ultimately transfer to and foster numerous experiences in reading.

Role of Student as Self-corrector

Of equal importance to the role of the teacher as error analyzer or feedback provider, are the roles of students in their own self-correction. According to Albright and Bailey (1998), self-correction refers to a student's reading for meaning. Therefore if students are only looking at visual clues, they are not self-correcting. Because making sense of what is being read is a main goal of reading, students take on the responsibility of continually asking questions of the text, forming reasonable predictions, and then cross-checking these predictions for accuracy. Even though many students at the emergent reading level have not quite mastered useful strategies for making meaning, they still begin to foster their own personal strategies that directly correlate to the difficulties they are having.

In direct comparison with Albright and Bailey (1998), Grimes (1981) discusses the notion of internal feedback in regards to self-correction. She refers to it as information from within the student which signals that his or her response was wrong. Internal feedback is the initial processing that takes place, and is followed by the student's self-correction of the error. When meaning is unaligned, internal feedback is triggered and self-correction must follow.

Corrective Feedback Strategies and Procedures

While many researchers including Schwartz (1997) believe in the importance of emergent readers learning to check their own behavior, rather than being required to use

structured procedural cues, there are recommended strategies and procedures that rely on common threads in reading and writing that are recognized as favorable guides among many teachers and researchers. These can be both teacher-directed as well as self-directed by students.

In his article discussing the development of two crucial reading processing strategies, Schwartz (1997) recognizes self-monitoring and searching as two behavior or strategies that play central roles in helping beginning readers learn to read. Monitoring is described as attending to the situation and noticing when things are not quite right. He goes on to describe searching strategies as those that enable us to gather cues for an initial attempt to read a text, make multiple tries at difficult words, and self-correct errors. Teaching procedures like phonics instruction, use of context clues, and analysis of words are known to foster these searching skills. If students can begin to understand and use these correctly, Schwartz (1997) suggests that they will become successful proficient readers.

Also dealing with corrective feedback as well as monitoring and searching, Gunning (1996) offers a Corrective Clues Hierarchy. This refers to a series of statements arranged in order of utility and ease of application that can be utilized when students make attempts of working out difficulties in reading or writing, but fail to do so correctly. These clues give the student a base from which to work from. (1) Context Clues: This requires students to look at the context around the problem word or phrase in order to have it make sense. (2) Phonics: This directs students to focus on the actual letters and sounds in the word. (3) Structural Analysis: This involves syllabic and/or morphemic breakdown of the word or words involved.

Various researchers also support Miscue Analysis, first developed in 1969 by Kenneth Goodman, which is yet another method focusing on finding meaning in reading. (Gunning, 1996; Schwartz, 1997; Goodman, 1996) Miscues are defined by Gunning (1996) as oral reading responses or word recognition errors that differ from the expected (correct) responses. Therefore Miscue Analysis is defined as a process concerned with determining which cueing system, semantic, syntactic, or graphophonic, or combination of these cueing systems, a student is utilizing. With this approach, providing actual immediate corrective feedback when they make a mistake is eliminated. (Gunning, 1996) Through Miscue Analysis students come to understand that reading is a meaning-making, constructive process, influenced by their own investment in and control over that process. Goodman (1996) recognizes this transition as revaluing by the students of their personal capabilities, and encouraging them to focus not on mistakes, but rather unexpected responses, and how they can transform them into expected responses.

Albright and Bailey (1998) suggest other common general strategies that can fit into a variety of greater procedures, some of which have been mentioned. These include skipping the word that is causing hesitation, giving it a try with a reasonable guess, substituting it with something else that makes sense, or going back to it when the student reaches a logical stopping point.

Conclusions

By investigating further the roles of teacher and student in the processes of error correction or corrective feedback, as well as when and how this should take place, one can begin to recognize many emerging similarities. Overwhelmingly, the research showed that the idea and uses of error correction and corrective feedback with emergent

readers and writers is widely supported. It also shows that correction should focus primarily on errors that disrupt meaning, and that it is more important to foster the development of monitoring strategies in beginning readers than it is to stress highly accurate responses. As a result of developmental progression, students will at some point respond accurately if they have reached the appropriate level to manipulate these methods and guidelines.

The evidence also overwhelmingly suggests that a teacher's role, especially as a model, is crucial in developing the skills for self-correction that students can independently make use of. Students need to see that actively evaluating themselves and their actions and determining what steps to take can be very beneficial in understanding and advancing their own learning.

Through the research, it is indirectly indicated that error correction and the strategies that are used to implement it are configured within a web-like structure, and that all participants and parts must be present and congruent in order for it to be held together successfully and beneficially. Furthermore, it implies that error correction and corrective feedback are not divided between clear cut classifications of teacher roles, students roles, and strategies used to facilitate correction. All of these things are interconnected to some extent. A student cannot advance without having a general working knowledge of error correction and self-correction strategies, which need to be used and modeled by the teacher. Also, research shows that the strategies and procedures surrounding error correction and corrective feedback are largely transferred or furthered at a greater rate with proficient readers, as well as students with various ranges of learning disabilities.

Implications

The issue now comes down to how the theories all relate to actual practice in classroom settings with a multitude of differing learners. What implications does error correction and corrective feedback have within a given classroom, and furthermore, what can be concluded about how teachers can begin to implement error correction in their classrooms?

It is important for teachers to remember that when dealing with error correction and corrective feedback, implications on a student's self-worth, self-confidence and self-esteem must be considered. No one likes to be corrected by another, and no one likes to be "made fun of" as a result. In certain instances, which at some point all teachers will probably be witness to, constant correction can begin to undermine a student's view of self, resulting in overly cautious readers and writers, whose inclinations to make educated guesses are thwarted, who are afraid to trust their own judgments, and are over reliant on feedback from others. It is important that students realize that making mistakes is understandable and common. No learning is ever errorless, because learning constantly pulls from students' banks of knowledge that are constantly shifting, reconfiguring, and creating new meanings and choices.

Secondly, it seems important to mention that much of the research in the areas of error correction and corrective feedback rests largely within the domain of teaching students with learning disabilities or teaching exceptional children. I question why this is so, considering that most if not all students at some point come upon difficult learning experiences and have to incorporate some forms of corrective strategies? All teachers

should realize that simply because this evidence rests in this discipline, does not mean that it will not infiltrate into their experiences with children not having these disabilities.

Even though much can be learned and clarified by examining closer the multiple functions and levels of error correction and corrective feedback, it must be confirmed that incorporating the use of these various methods and strategies must be ultimately dependent upon the nature of the word or words being identified, and the student's background experiences with applying them. It all falls back to the teacher's understanding of her student's needs, and when it is necessary to intervene on a child's thinking procedures. Once again we see evidence of teachers having to make educated snap decisions and value judgments of what will be most beneficial in a given situation, based on individual students. The key here is observation. Teachers learn from their students as they watch them learn. This is crucial for not only the planning of curriculum and instruction by also for constantly expanding their own working knowledge surrounding teaching and learning.

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